

## **Historic, Archive Document**

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



F O R T U N E S    W A S H E D    A W A Y

"THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY"

Broadcast No. 50 in a series of  
discussions of soil conservation.

WLW, Cincinnati

April 8, 1939    6:45-7:00 p.m.

---

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE  
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ALLISON

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ALLISON

The Tennessee River squirms south, edges west, and wriggles north through a mighty valley, a river and a valley fed by the waters of many a brook, many a creek, many a rill. Down the Clinch, the Cataloochee, the Cane, the Chickamauga go many little waters; down the Ivy, Laurel, Cypress, down the Pigeon, Elk, Doe, Bear, Duck, Buffalo, down the Tennessee River. From a thousand hillsides, the rains come down in floods you do not see. For those floods, floods you do not see, are the many waters which run off the land, instead of into it. To develop the potential public usefulness of the area, in 1933 the Congress of the United States established the Tennessee Valley Authority. Senator Norris quoted from the President's Message...

NORRIS

Such use.....transcends mere power development: it enters the wide fields of flood control, soil erosion, afforestation, elimination from agricultural use of marginal lands.....(fade)

ORGAN: OLD MAN RIVER.

ALLISON

The Tennessee Valley Authority has gone far since 1933. A mighty network of dams and reservoirs embraces the valley, and a more extensive water development system is in the making. Last month, appearing before the National Harbors and Rivers Congress, Chairman Harcourt A. Morgan told the group....



MORGAN

A noted jurist once said that in the arid West "water is life!" I have often wondered why, if that learned gentleman intended to be profound, he so restricted his remark. Possibly he had in mind that in humid regions an abundance of water, if uncontrolled, may be an agency of destruction and despair. In any event, this is the consequence where, as in the Tennessee Valley, the farm and forest practices over many generations have left the land exposed to the havoc of "the floods you do not see."

MORGAN: OLD MAN RIVER.

ALLISON

One inch of rainfall on just one acre of land weighs nearly 113 tons. In the Tennessee Valley area in a year, nearly 6,000 tons of water fall on every acre. When this water falls on the foliage of trees and shrubs, on matted blades of grass, it is absorbed, it penetrates into the soil. But where man disturbs nature, bares the soil to the tremendous force of falling, rushing water, there follow "the floods you do not see." To combat soil erosion, farmers in more than 250 communities of the Tennessee Valley are using their farms for demonstration purposes. Two years ago in Meigs County, Tennessee, County Agricultural Agent W. A. Shadow discussed one of those farms...

SHADOW

I tell you, Bill, this corrugated plow the University has developed is going to be a big help. Now that the TVA has made it available...

STORY

No question. It ought to help a lot of farmers seed their grain on the contour.





SHADOW

And that's what we've got to come to, not only here in Meigs county, but all over Tennessee. Contour seeding will not only help to prevent erosion and conserve moisture, but it'll help prevent floods by slowing up the run-off of water.

STORY

More than that, Shad. It saves nitrogen. And it looks like it's going to lead to livestock farming.

SHADOW

I hope so. We need more livestock farming. We ought to produce more hay and grain, and feed that hay and grain.

STORY

I get you. When you sell your grain, you're selling your fertility. But if you feed that grain, you return it to the land.

SHADOW

That's it, exactly. Now, this corrugated plow is plenty radical, and a lot of farmers won't want to use it. But I'm going to try it out on my little farm, and J. W. Lillard has promised to use it. I wish you'd scout around and see who else will put in a corduroy field.

STORY

Corduroy field. That's a good way of putting it. It may look a little rough, but it sure will wear.

ORGAN: OLD MAN RIVER.



ALLISON

Many little waters run over Meigs County farmlands, run down many little channels, down the Hiwassee, down Sewee Creek, down Goodfields, Gunstocker, down Bull Frog, down the Tennessee River. To retard those waters, W. A. Shadow and Bill Story worked with the farmers, urged more and more contour cultivation. One farmer, a TVA demonstrator, was Troy Skelton. And last year...

SOUND: Wheat drill pulled by team of horses. Drill strikes occasional rocks as man spreads phosphate.

STORY (fading in)

That's the stuff, Troy. I like to see you spreading that phosphate.

SKELTON

Howdy, Bill, howdy! Whoa, now.

SOUND: Team stops.

SKELTON

Yeah, I could even use some more. Gotta get this land in shape for lespedeza, you know.

STORY

Well, that's one good way of building it up. Farmers have been using phosphate for a long time, Troy.

SKELTON

Yes, I suppose so.

STORY

I was reading the other day about the Romans. They spread ground bone and wood ashes over their fields, and it helped them grow legumes, thousands of years ago.

SKELTON

You don't say! Well, this field has been washing, and I'm going to fix it up. I've just got to start from scratch. Haven't got anything much to work with.



STORY

That's what I came to see you about. Paul Sanders is through with that TVA corrugated seeder, and you can have it.

SKELTON

Well, to tell you the truth, Bill, I'm not so keen on the idea. I'm afraid that everybody that comes along will stop and want to know what that darn thing is.

STORY

You wait until you see how the contour drill marks hold the soil. You know what Sanders said about it?

SKELTON

No, what was that?

STORY

He said that if every farmer in East Tennessee sowed his wheat on the contour, we wouldn't have any floods.

SKELTON

I'll admit, I haven't been so hot on the idea, but if you fellows want me to try it, I will. Every drop of water that runs off my field carries some of the soil with it. And when I see the highway department come along and scoop it up, I tell you, it hurts. They're just hauling my farm away. If you say that contour seeding will slow up the water, I'll sure do my part. The Tennessee River has got enough water like it is.

ORGAN: OLD MAN RIVER.





ALLISON

Countless billions of raindrops have flowed from the hills of Meigs County since it was carved out of the Cherokee territory more than a century ago. Billions of raindrops, millions and millions of rills have gone on down the Hiwasee, down the Sewee, down the Tennessee River. But far-sighted farmers, men like Troy Skelton, are cooperating with state and federal agricultural workers in holding the raindrops on the hilltops, working to hold this soil, working to prevent "the floods you do not see."

ORGAN: OLD MAN RIVER.

ALLISON

And now, once more we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and to Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thank you, Paul Allison. Today, we are observing the sixth anniversary of the Civilian Conservation Corps. As a sort of birthday celebration, we have four CCC camp superintendents with us, to tell us just what's going on in soil-saving operations in their respective areas. They are John D. Riley, from down around Elizabethtown, Kentucky; Dudley O. Williams, from the famed bluegrass country near Carlisle, Kentucky; E. S. Abele, from Ohio's corn belt, at Wilmington; and J. M. McCoid, from the rolling fields near Brookville, Indiana. Well, Dud Williams, suppose you start the ball rolling.





WILLIAMS

Ewing, I'd just like to give you one instance of how farmers are finding that strip cropping and contour cultivation pay dividends. Last summer, we had a 5-inch rain in 24 hours. After that rain, Reynolds Letton, of Bourbon County, found out for himself. Part of one tobacco field was planted on the contour, part up and down hill. When the rains came, the up-and-down hill portion was badly washed, some of it to bedrock. Silt caught by a grass strip measured 6 inches deep, 10 feet wide, and 90 feet long. And of course, there was no way of measuring the amount of silt that washed away in the stream below the pasture. On the other hand, the field on the contour showed little damage. County Agricultural Agent Phil Watlington held a field tour last fall, and the group visited the Letton farm. When they saw how the contour tillage held the soil, several farmers decided that they would cultivate on the level hereafter. The last report that we have is that some 15 farmers in our area are laying out their own strips this spring.

JONES

Thank you, Dudley Williams, of Carlisle, Kentucky. I know what a fine record your camp is making, and more power to you. Now, let's cross over into the Hoosier state, and see what J. M. McCoid has to say. Mac, what's the good word from Brookville, Indiana?

McCROID

Well, this is the time of year when a number of our cooperators are beginning to pay attention to the natural waterways or draws in their fields. They're protecting them with sod waterways.



JONES

And a little attention to these places now may save a big doctor's bill later.

McCROID

That's the way our cooperators look at it. Mrs. Rose Montgomery, and Pius C. Selm are a couple of good farmers who are using sod waterways.

JONES

How about a little information on protecting these natural waterways, Mac?

McCROID

One way to protect these waterways in cultivated fields is to take them out of cultivation and plant them to well-adapted grasses. After the vegetation is established, it will spread surface water evenly, reduce its cutting power and prevent concentration in a narrow channel.

JONES

This method should be both effective and economical.

McCROID

It is. Our records indicate that some of the best hay crops on the farm are often produced in natural grassed waterways. Of course, regular mowing will help to get a good sod cover. The grass should be mowed before it is allowed to seed.

JONES

How about the rate of seeding?



McCOID

Ewing, because of different soil and climatic conditions, I'd suggest that farmers contact their county agents or Soil Conservation Service representatives to determine the best seed mixture to use. Seeding rates, however, should be slightly higher than for pasture or meadow seeding, because a heavier and more rapid growth is important. Experience has shown that a companion crop of small grain is often a help in getting vegetation established. And fertilization is needed.

JONES

Of course. Now, for plowing recommendations....

McCOID

When plowing, these grassed waterways should always be crossed at right angles, and the plow lifted out of the ground at the edge of the strip so as not to disturb the sod. Also, the edges of the grassed waterway should extend well back onto the shoulders of the draw and be left quite irregular as an added precaution to prevent washing there. Too many vegetated waterways are not wide enough to be effective. But a good grassed waterway will save a lot of trouble, and a lot of soil.

JONES

I'm sure that the farmers around Franklin and Union Counties will agree with you. Thank you, J. M. McCoid, of the Brookville, Indiana, CCC camp. And now, here is E. S. Abele, of Wilmington, Ohio. Ed, you camp has been working toward a well-rounded program of better land use. And that phrase, better land use, should give you your cue.





ABELE

Clinton County farmers certainly are turning to better land use. In simple terms, that means that land best suited for forests is being returned to trees, land best suited for pasture or meadow is being retired to pasture and meadow, and the more gentle slopes are being cultivated, with various soil conservation measures.

There is a good dollars-and-cents reason for making these changes in land use. In the long run, poor land use doesn't pay. Farmers know that it doesn't pay to let the soil wash away until sheet erosion and gullies make the land practically worthless... that it doesn't pay, for example, to spend year after year raising unprofitable crops on land that could show a valuable return if used in pasture.

There are some even more significant reasons why poor land use is poor economy for the nation as a whole. A family farming a piece of poor, unproductive land naturally finds it almost impossible to make a living. Often they don't make enough to pay taxes, and the schools and roads suffer.

Well, I don't think we're going to have to worry about that angle in Clinton County, if farmers continue in their trend toward better land use. Nearly 140 farmers, operating more than 21,000 acres, are cooperating with the CCC camp in its land use program. I think those figures speak for themselves.

JONES

And they speak a lot of praise for the farsighted attitude of Clinton County, Ohio. Good luck to you, Ed Abele, and thanks for coming up here. Now, to wind up this intersectional report on soil conservation, we have the smiling Irishman from Elizabethtown, Kentucky. John D. Riley.





RILEY

I think I have a good reason to smile, Ewing. Farmers around E-town are also pointing toward better land use. When Ed Abele mentioned land use, I immediately thought of pasture improvement.

JONES

Better land use certainly includes increased pasture production. And from your experience in Kentucky agriculture, John, you ought to know what it includes.

RILEY

It includes mainly the fertilization of pastures already established, by the use of limestone and phosphate, in order to support a better sod. Incidentally, the E-town camp has quarried and crushed something like 15,000 tons of agricultural limestone to sweeten the soils of Hardin County. Pasture improvement also includes clipping weeds, and grazing regulation.

JONES

And what does pasture establishment involve?

RILEY

Not only the practices I've already mentioned, but also preparation and seeding of the land. This may include cleaning undergrowth, stopping gullies, removing stones, providing drainage, and the preparation of a firm seedbed. By keeping stock off the pastures until they become established, keeping weeds clipped for the protection of the pasture plants, helping control the water movement, and using proper judgment in grazing, permanent pastures can be made productive and profitable, and this is the season to start. And Hardin County farmers are well on the way.



JONES

I believe they are, John D. Riley, and once more, our thanks to you for being with us. These reports from Elizabethtown and Carlisle, Kentucky; Wilmington, Ohio; and Brookville, Indiana, show that the entire Ohio Valley is becoming conservation-conscious. That gives the Soil Conservation Service encouragement, and the Civilian Conservation Corps a happy birthday.

SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ALLISON

Next week, 4-H Clubs. Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

1604-13

#

